
THE
Archbishop of *CANTERBURY*'s
S E R M O N
BEFORE THE
KING and QUEEN
AT
WHITE-HALL

February the 25th 169³/₄.

Being the first Sunday in Lent.

THE

SERMON

DELIVERED

KING and QUEEN

AT

W H I T E H A L L

being the first sermon in that

A
S E R M O N

Preached before the
KING and QUEEN

A T
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February the 25th 169³/₄.

Being the first *Sunday* in *Lent*.

By J O H N Lord Archbishop of *Canterbury*.

Published by Their Majesties Special Command.

L O N D O N,

Printed for *Brabazon Aylmer*, at the *Three Pigeons*
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A

SERMON

Preached before the

KING and QUEEN

AT

WHITE-HALL

February the 25th 1693

Being the first Sunday in Lent.

By JOHN Lord Archbishop of Canterbury.

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A
S E R M O N

Preached before the
KING and QUEEN.

TITUS III. 2.

To speak evil of no man.



GENERAL Persuasives to Repen-
tance and a good Life, and Inve-
ctives against Sin and wickedness at
large, are certainly of good use to
recommend Religion and Virtue,
and to expose the deformity and
danger of a Vicious course. But it must be ac-
knowledged on the other hand, that these gene-
ral Discourses do not so immediately tend to re-
form the Lives of men : Because they fall among
the Croud, but do not touch the Consciences of
particular Persons in so sensible and awakening a
manner as when we treat of particular Duties and
Sins, and endeavour to put men upon the practice

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of the one and to reclaim them from the other, by proper Arguments taken from the Word of God, and from the nature of particular Virtues and Vices.

The general way is, as if a Physician, instead of applying particular Remedies to the Distemper of his Patient, should entertain him with a long discourse of Diseases in general, and of the pleasure and advantages of Health; and earnestly persuade him to be well; without taking his particular Disease into consideration, and prescribing Remedies for it.

But if we would effectually reform men, we must take to task the great and common disorders of their Lives, and represent their faults to them in such a manner as may convince them of the evil and danger of them, and put them upon the endeavour of a cure.

And to this end I have pitched upon one of the common and reigning Vices of the Age, *Calumny* and *evil-speaking*; by which men contract so much guilt to themselves, and create so much trouble to others: And from which, it is to be feared, few or none are wholly free. For *who is he*, saith the Son of Sirach, *that hath not offended with his tongue?* In many things, saith St. James, *we offend all: And if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.*

Ecclus.
19. 16.

Jam. 3.
2.

But

But how few have attain'd to this perfection? And yet unless we do endeavour after it, and in some good measure attain it, all our pretence to Religion is vain: so the same *Apostle* tells us, *If Jam. 1. any man among you seemeth to be religious, and bridleth^{26.} not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's Religion is vain.*

For the more distinct handling of this Argument, I shall reduce my Discourse to these *Five Heads*.

First, I shall consider the nature of this Vice and wherein it consists.

Secondly, I shall consider the due extent of this Prohibition, *to speak evil of no man.*

Thirdly, I shall shew the evil of this practice, both in the *Causes* and *Effects* of it.

Fourthly, I shall add some further Considerations to dissuade men from it.

Fifthly, I shall give some Rules and Directions for the prevention and cure of it.

I. I shall consider *what this Sin or Vice of evil-speaking, here forbidden by the Apostle, is: μωδέναι βλασφημεῖν*, not to defame and slander any man, not to hurt his reputation, as the *Etymology* of the word doth import. So that this Vice consists in saying things of others which tend to their dis-

paragement and reproach, to the taking away or lessening of their reputation and good Name. And this, whether the things said be true or not. If they be false, and we know it, then it is downright *Calumny*; and if we do not know it, but take it upon the report of others, it is however a *Slander*; and so much the more injurious, because really groundless and undeserved.

If the thing be true, and we know it to be so, yet it is a defamation and tends to the prejudice of our neighbour's reputation: And it is a fault to say the evil of others which is true, unless there be some good reason for it besides: Because it is contrary to that charity and goodness which *Christianity* requires to divulge the faults of others, though they be really guilty of them, without necessity or some other very good reason for it.

Again, it is *evil-speaking* and the Vice condemn'd in the *Text*, whether we be the first Authors of an ill Report, or relate it from others; because the man that is evil spoken of is equally defam'd either way.

Again, whether we speak evil of a man to his face, or behind his back: The former way indeed seems to be the more generous, but yet is a great Fault, and that which we call *reviling*: The latter is more mean and base, and that which we properly call *Slander* or *backbiting*.

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And lastly, whether it be done directly and in expresse terms, or more obscurely and by way of oblique insinuation; whether by way of downright reproach, or with some crafty preface of commendation: For so it have the effect to defame, the manner of address does not much alter the case: The one may be more dextrous, but is not one jot less faulty. For many times the deepest Wounds are given by these smother and more artificial ways of Slander; as by asking questions, *Have you not heard so and so of such a man? I say no more, I only ask the question:* Or by general intimations, that *they are loth to say what they have heard of such a one, are very sorry for it, and do not at all believe it, if you will believe them:* And this many times without telling the thing, but leaving you in the dark to suspect the worst.

These and such like Arts, though they may seem to be tenderer and gentler ways of using mens reputation, yet in truth they are the most malicious and effectual methods of Slander; because they insinuate something that is much worse than is said, and yet are very apt to create in unwary men a strong belief of something that is very bad, though they know not what it is. So that it matters not in what fashion a Slander is dress'd up, if it tend to defame a man and to diminish his Reputation, it is the Sin forbidden in the *Text*.

II. We will consider the extent of this Prohibition to speak evil of no man; and the due bounds and limitations of it. For it is not to be understood absolutely, to forbid us to say any thing concerning others that is bad. This in some cases may be necessary and our duty, and in several cases very fit and reasonable. The Question is, in what Cases by the general Rules of Scripture and right Reason we are warranted to say the evil of others that is true?

Ecclus.
19. 8.

In general, we are not to do this without great reason and necessity; as, for the prevention of some great evil, or the procuring of some considerable good to our selves, or others. And this I take to be the meaning of that advice of the Son of Sirach, *whether it be to a friend or a foe, talk not of other mens lives; and if thou canst without offence reveal them not, that is, if without hurt to any body thou canst conceal them, divulge them not.*

But because this may not be direction sufficient, I shall instance in some of the principal Cases wherein men are warranted to speak evil of others, and yet in so doing do not offend against this Prohibition in the Text.

First, It is not only lawful, but very commendable, and many times our duty to do this in order to the probable amendment of the person of whom

evil

evil is spoken. In such a case we may tell a man of his faults privately ; or where it may not be so fit for us to use that boldness and freedom, we may reveal his faults to one who is more fit and proper to reprove him, and will probably make no other use of this discovery but in order to his amendment. And this is so far from being a breach of charity, that it is one of the best testimonies of it. For perhaps the party may not be guilty of what hath been reported of him, and then it is a kindness to give him the opportunity of vindicating himself : Or if he be guilty, perhaps being privately told of it he may reform. In this Case the Son of Sirach adviseth to reveal mens faults, *Admonish a friend*, says he, *it may be he hath not done it, and if he have done it, that he do it no more : admonish a friend, it may be he hath not said it, and if he have, that he speak it not again : admonish a friend, for many times it is a slander ; and believe not every tale.* Eccclus.
12. 13.
14, 15.

But then we must take care that this be done out of kindness, and that nothing of our own passion be mingled with it ; and that under pretence of reproof and reforming men we do not reproach and revile them, and tell them of their faults in such a manner as if we did it to shew our *authority* rather than our *charity*. It requires a great deal of address and gentle application so to manage the business of Reproof, as not to irritate and exasperate

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rate the person whom we reprove, instead of curing him.

Secondly, This likewise is not only lawful but our duty, when we are legally called to bear witness concerning the fault and crime of another. A good man would not be an accuser, unless the publick good, or the prevention of some great evil should require it. And then the plain reason of the thing will sufficiently justify a voluntary accusation: otherwise it hath always among well-manner'd People been esteemed very odious for a man to be officious in this kind, and a forward Informer concerning the misdemeanours of others. *Magistrates* may sometimes think it fit to give encouragement to such persons, and to set one bad man to catch another, because such men are fittest for such dirty work: But they can never inwardly approve them, nor will they ever make them their friends and confidants.

But when a man is call'd to give testimony in this kind in obedience to the Laws, and out of reverence to the Oath taken in such Cases, he is so far from deserving blame for so doing, that it would be an unpardonable fault in him to conceal the truth, or any part of it.

Thirdly, It is lawful to publish the faults of others, in our own necessary defence and vindication. When a man cannot conceal another's faults without betraying

traying his own innocency, no charity requires a man to suffer himself to be defamed to save the reputation of another man. *Charity begins at home,* and though a man had never so much goodness he would first secure his own good name, and then be concern'd for other men's. *We are to love our neighbour as our selves;* so that the love of our selves is the Rule and measure of our love to our neighbour: And therefore *first*, otherwise it could not be *Rule*. And it would be very well for the World, if our charity would rise thus high; and no man would hurt another man's reputation, but where his own is in real danger.

Fourthly, This also is lawful for caution and warning to a third person, that is in danger to be infected by the company, or ill example of another; or may be greatly prejudiced by reposing too much confidence in him, having no knowledge or suspicion of his bad qualities: But even in this case we ought to take great care that the ill character we give of any man be spread no further than is necessary to the good end we designed in it.

Besides these more obvious and remarkable Cases, this Prohibition doth not I think hinder but that in ordinary conversation men may mention that ill of others which is already made as publick as it well can be: Or that one friend may not in freedom speak to another of the miscarriage of

a third person, where he is secure no ill use will be made of it, and that it will go no further to his prejudice : Provided always, that we take no delight in hearing or speaking ill of others : And the less we do it, though without any malice or design of harm, still the better ; because this shews that we do not feed upon ill reports and take pleasure in them.

These are the usual Cases in which it may be necessary for us to speak evil of other men. And these are so evidently reasonable that the Prohibition in the *Text* cannot with reason be extended to them. And if no man would allow himself to say any thing to the prejudice of another man's good name, but in these and the like Cases, the tongues of men would be very innocent, and the World would be very quiet. I proceed in the

III. III^d place, to consider *the evil of this Practice*, both in the *Causes* and the *Consequences* of it.

First, We will consider the *Causes* of it. And it commonly springs from one or more of these evil Roots.

First, One of the deepest and most common *Causes* of *evil-speaking* is *ill-nature* and cruelty of disposition : And by a general mistake *ill nature* passeth for *Wit*, as *Cunning* doth for *Wisdom* ; though in truth they

they are nothing akin to one another, but as far distant as *Vice* and *Virtue*.

And there is no greater evidence of the bad temper of Mankind, than the general proneness of men to this Vice. For (as our Saviour says) *out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*. And therefore men do commonly incline to the censorious and uncharitable side : which shews Human nature to be strangely distorted from its original rectitude and innocency. The Wit of man doth more naturally vent it self in *Satyr* and censure, than in praise and *Panegyrick*. When men set themselves to commend, it comes hardly from them, and not without great force and straining ; and if any thing be fitly said in that kind, it doth hardly relish with most men : But in the way of *Invective*, the Invention of men is a plentiful and never-failing Spring : And this kind of Wit is not more easie than it is acceptable : It is greedily entertained and greatly applauded, and every man is glad to hear others abused, not considering how soon it may come to his own turn to lie down and make sport for others.

To speak evil of others, is almost become the general entertainment of all Companies : And the great and serious business of most Meetings and Visits, after the necessary Ceremonies and Complements are over, is to sit down and backbite

all the World. 'Tis the *Sauce* of Conversation, and all Discourse is counted but flat and dull which hath not something of *picquaney* and sharpness in it against some body. For men generally love rather to hear evil of others than good; and are secretly pleas'd with ill reports, and drink them in with greediness and delight: Though at the same time they have so much Justice, as to hate those that propagate them; and so much Wit, as to conclude that these very persons will do the same for them in another Place and Company.

But especially, if it concerns one of another *Party*, and that differs from us in matters of Religion; in this Case, all Parties seem to be agreed that they do God great service in blasting the reputation of their Adversaries: And though they all pretend to be *Christians*, and the *Disciples of Him* who taught nothing but *kindness* and *meekness* and *charity*; yet it is strange to see with what a savage and murderous disposition they will flie at one another's Reputation and tear it in pieces: And whatever other *Scruples* they may have, they make none to bespatter one another in the most bitter and slanderous manner.

But if they hear any good of their Adversaries, with what nicety and caution do they receive it? how many objections do they raise against it? and with what coldness do they at last admit it? *It*

is very well, say they, if it be true : I shall be glad to hear it confirm'd. I never heard so much good of him before. You are a good man your self, but have a care you be not deceived.

Nay it is well, if to balance the matter, and set things even, they do not clap some infirmity and fault into the other Scale, that so the Enemy may not go off with flying Colours.

But on the other side, every man is a good and substantial Author of an ill Report. I do not apply this to any one sort of men, though all are to blame in this way ; *Iliacos intra muros peccatur, & extra.* To speak impartially, the Zealots of all Parties have got a scurvy trick of lying for the Truth.

But of all sorts of People, I have observed the Priests and Bigots of the Church of Rome to be the ablest in this way, and to have the strongest Faith for a lusty Falshood and Calumny. Others will bandy a false Report, and toss it from one hand to another ; but I never knew any that would so hug a Lye and be so very fond of it. They seem to be described by St. John in that expression in the Revelation, *whosoever loveth and maketh a lye.*

Another shrewd sign that ill-nature lies at the root of this Vice is, that we easily forget the good that is said of others, and seldom make mention

of

of it; but the contrary sticks with us, and lies uppermost in our memories, and is ready to come out upon all occasions: And which is yet more ill-natur'd and unjust, many times when we do not believe it our selves we tell it to others, with this charitable Caution *that we hope it is not true*: But in the mean time we give it our *Pass*, and venture it to take its fortune to be believed or not, according to the charity of those into whose hands it comes.

Matth.
24. 12.

Secondly, Another Cause of the commonness of this Vice is, that many are so bad themselves, in one kind or other. For to think and speak ill of others is not only a bad thing, but a sign of a bad man. Our *B. Saviour*, speaking of the evil of the *last days*, gives this as the reason of the great decay of Charity among men, *because iniquity shall abound, the Love of many shall wax cold*. When men are bad themselves, they are glad of any opportunity to censure others, and are always apt to suspect that evil of other men which they know by themselves. They cannot have a good opinion of themselves, and therefore are very unwilling to have so of any body else; and for this reason they endeavour to bring men to a level, hoping it will be some justification of them if they can but render others as bad as themselves.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, Another source of this Vice is *Malice* and *Revenge*. When men are in heat and Passion they do not consider what is true, but what is spiteful and mischievous; and speak evil of others in revenge of some injury which they have received from them: And when they are blinded by their Passions they lay about them madly and at a venture, not much caring whether the evil they speak be true or not. Nay many are so *Devilish*, as to invent and raise false Reports on purpose to blast mens Reputation. This is a *Diabolical* temper, and therefore *St. James* tells us that the slanderous Tongue is set on fire of *Hell*: And the Devil hath his very Name from *Calumny* and false accusation; and it is his Nature too, for he is always ready to stir up and foment this evil spirit among men: Nay, the *Scripture* tells us that he hath the malice and impudence to accuse good men before God; as he did *Job*, charging him with *Hypocrisie* to God himself; *Who*, he knows, does know the hearts of all the children of men.

Fourthly, Another Cause of evil-speaking is *Envy*. Men look with an evil eye upon the good that is in others, and think that their Reputation obscures them, and that their commendable qualities do stand in their light; and therefore they do what they can to cast a cloud over them, that the bright shining of their Vertues may not scorch them. This makes them greedily to entertain, and industriously to publish

publish any thing that may serve to that purpose, thereby to raise themselves upon the Ruins of other mens Reputation : And therefore as soon as they have got an ill Report of any good man by the end, to work they presently go to send it abroad by the first Post : For the string is always ready upon their Bow to let fly this Arrow with an incredible swiftness, through City and Countrey ; for fear the innocent man's justification should overtake it.

Fifthly, Another Cause of evil speaking is *Impertinence* and *Curiosity* ; an itch of talking and meddling in the affairs of other Men, which do no wise concern them. Some persons love to mingle themselves in all business, and are loth to seem ignorant of so important a piece of *News* as the faults and follies of men, or any bad thing that is talk'd of in good Company. And therefore they do with great care pick up ill Stories, as good matter of discourse in the next Company that is worthy of them : And this perhaps not out of any great malice, but for want of something better to talk of, and because their Parts lie chiefly that way.

Lastly, Men do this many times out of *wantonness* and for *diversion*. So little do light and vain men consider, that a man's Reputation is too great and tender a Concernment to be jested withal ; and that a slanderous Tongue bites like a Serpent, and wounds like a Sword. For what can be more barbarous,

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next to sporting with a man's Life, than to play with his Honour and Reputation, which to some men is dearer to them than their Lives?

It is a cruel pleasure which some men take in worrying the Reputation of others much better than themselves; and this only to divert themselves and the Company. Solomon compares this sort of men to distracted persons; *As a mad man, saith he, who casteth firebrands, arrows and Death, so is the man that deceiveth his neighbour*; the LXX. render it *so is the man that defameth his neighbour, and saith am I not in sport?* Such, and so bad are the Causes of this Vice. I proceed to consider, in the

Second place, the ordinary but very pernicious Consequences and Effects of it; both to Others, and to our Selves.

First, To Others; the Parties I mean that are slandered. To them it is certainly a great injury, and commonly a high Provocation, but always matter of no small grief and trouble to them.

It is certainly a great injury, and if the evil which we say of them be not true, it is an injury beyond imagination, and beyond all possible reparation. And though we should do our utmost endeavour afterwards towards their Vindication, yet that makes but very little amends; because the Vindication seldom reacheth so far as the Reproach, and

because commonly men are neither so forward to spread the Vindication, nor is it so easily received after ill impressions are once made.

I will add one thing more, that it is an Injury that descends to a man's Children and Posterity; because the good or ill Name of the Father is derived down to them; and many times the best thing he hath to leave them is the Reputation of his unblemish'd Virtue and Worth: And do we make no Conscience to rob his innocent Children of the best part of this small Patrimony, and of all the kindness that would have been done them for their Father's sake, if his Reputation had not been so undeservedly stain'd? Is it no Crime by the breath of our mouth at once to blast a man's Reputation, and to ruin his Children, perhaps to all Posterity? Can we make a jest of so serious a matter? Of an Injury so very hard to be repented of as it ought, because in such a Case no Repentance will be acceptable without Restitution, if it be in our power. And perhaps it will undo us in this World to make it, and if we do it not, will be our Ruin in the other.

I will put the Case at the best, that the matter of the Slander is true; yet no man's Reputation is considerably stained, though never so deservedly, without great harm and damage to him. And it is great odds but the matter by passing through several hands is aggravated beyond truth, every one

one out of his bounty being apt to add something to it.

But, besides the *Injury*, it is commonly a very high *Provocation*. And the consequence of that may be as bad as we can imagine, and may end in dangerous and desperate Quarrels. This reason the wise Son of *Sirach* gives why we should defame no man: *Whether it be*, says he, *to a friend or a foe*, *Eccles.* *talk not of other mens lives. For he hath heard and* 19. 8. *observed thee*, that is, one way or other it will probably come to his knowledge, and when the time cometh he will *shew his hatred*, that is, he will take the first opportunity to revenge it.

At the best, it is always matter of *Grief* to the person that is defam'd: And *Christianity*, which is the *best-natur'd Institution* in the world, forbids us the doing of those things whereby we may grieve one another. A man's good name is a tender thing, and a wound there sinks deep into the spirit even of a wise and good man: And the more innocent any man is in this kind, the more sensible is he of this hard usage; because he never treats others so, nor is he conscious to himself that he hath deserved it.

Secondly, The Consequences of this Vice are as bad or worse to our selves. Whoever is wont to speak evil of others gives a bad character of himself, even to those whom he desires to please; who, if

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they be wise enough, will conclude that he speaks of them to others as he does of others to them: And were it not for that fond partiality which men have for themselves, no man could be so blind as not to see this.

And it is very well worthy of our consideration which our Saviour says in this very Case, that *with what measure we mete to others, it shall be measured to us again*; and that many times *heaped up, and running over*. For there is hardly any thing wherein Mankind do use more strict justice and equality, than in rendering evil for evil, and railing for railing.

Nay, Revenge often goes further than words. A reproachful and slanderous speech hath cost many a man a *Duel*, and in that the loss of his own Life, or the Murther of another, perhaps with the loss of his own Soul: And I have often wonder'd that among *Christians* this matter is no more laid to heart.

And though neither of these great mischiefs should happen to us, yet this may be inconvenient enough many other ways. For no man knows in the chance of things, and the mutability of human affairs, whose kindness and good-will he may come to stand in need of before he dies. So that did a man only consult his own safety and quiet, he ought to refrain from evil-speaking. What man is he, saith the *Psalmist*, that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good: keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking falsehood.

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But there is an infinitely greater Danger hanging over us from God. If we allow our selves in this evil practice, all our Religion is good for nothing. So St. James expressly tells us, *If any man among you seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's Religion is vain.* And St. Paul puts Slanderers and Revilers amongst those that shall not inherit the kingdom of God. And our B. Saviour hath told us, that by our words we shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned. To which I will add the counsel given us by the Wise-man, *Refrain your tongue: from backbiting, for there is no word so secret that shall go for nought, and the mouth that slandereth slayeth the Soul.* I proceed in the

Jam. 1.

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1 Cor. 6.

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IVth place, to add some further Arguments and Considerations to take men off from this Vice: As

First, That the use of Speech is a peculiar Privilege of Man above other Creatures, and bestowed upon him for some excellent end and purpose: That by this Faculty we might communicate our thoughts more easily to one another, and consult together for our mutual comfort and benefit: Not to enable us to be hurtful and injurious, but helpful and beneficial to one another. The Psalmist calls our Tongue our Glory; therewith we praise God and bless men: Now to bless is to speak well of any, and to wish them well. So that we pervert the use of

Speech

Speech and turn our glory into shame, when we abuse this Faculty to the injury and reproach of any.

Secondly, Consider how cheap a kindness it is to speak well, at least not to speak ill of any. A good word is an easy obligation, but not to speak ill requires only our Silence, which costs us nothing. Some instances of Charity are chargeable, as to relieve the wants and necessities of others: The expence deters many from this kind of charity. But were a man never so covetous, he might afford another man his good word; at least he might refrain from speaking ill of him: especially if it be consider'd how dear many have paid for a slanderous and reproachful word.

Thirdly, Consider that no quality doth ordinarily recommend one more to the favour and good-will of men, than to be free from this Vice. Every one desires such a man's friendship, and is apt to repose a great trust and confidence in him: And when he is dead, men will praise him; and next to Piety towards God, and Righteousness to men, nothing is thought a more significant commendation, than that he was never, or very rarely heard to speak ill of any. It was a singular Character of a Roman Gentleman, *Nescivit quid esset maledicere*, he knew not what it was to give any man an ill word.

Fourthly, Let every man lay his hand upon his heart, and consider how himself is apt to be affected with

with this usage. Speak thy Conscience *Mm*, and say whether, as bad as thou art, thou wouldst not be glad to have every man's, especially every good man's, good word? And to have thy faults conceal'd, and not to be hardly spoken of, though it may be not altogether without truth, by those whom thou didst never offend by word or deed? But with what face or reason dost thou expect this from others, to whom thy carriage hath been so contrary? Nothing surely is more equal and reasonable than that known *Rule*, *What thou wouldst have no man do to thee, that do thou to no man.*

Fifthly, When you are going to speak reproachfully of others, consider whether you do not lie open to just reproach in the same, or some other kind. Therefore give no Occasion, no Example of this barbarous usage of one another.

There are very few so innocent and free either from infirmities or greater faults, as not to be obnoxious to reproach upon one account or other; even the wisest, and most virtuous, and most perfect among men have some little vanity, or affectation which lays them open to the raillery of a mimical and malicious wit: Therefore we should often turn our thoughts upon our selves, and look into that part of the *Mirror* which men commonly sling over their shoulders and keep behind them, that they may not see their own Faults: And when

we have searched that well, let us remember our Saviour's Rule, *He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone.*

Lastly consider, That it is in many Cases as great a charity to conceal the evil you hear and know of others, as if you relieved them in a great necessity. And we think him a hard-hearted man that will not bestow a small Alms upon one in great want. It is an excellent Advice which the Son of Sirach gives to this purpose, Talk not of other mens lives : If thou
 Ecclus. 19. 10. *hast heard a word, let it die with thee ; and be bold it will not burst thee. I shall in the*

V. Vth and last place, give some Rules and Directions for the prevention and cure of this great evil among men.

First, Never say any evil of any man, but what you certainly know. When ever you positively accuse and endite any man of any Crime, though it be in private and among Friends, speak as if you were upon your Oath, because God sees and hears you. This not only Charity, but Justice and regard to Truth do demand of us. He that easily credits an ill Report is almost as faulty as the first inventer of it. For though you do not make, yet you commonly propagate a Lye. Therefore never speak evil of any upon common Fame, which for the most part is false, but almost always uncertain whether it be true or not.

Not

Not but that is a fault, in most Cases, to report the evil of men which is true, and which we certainly know to be so: But if I cannot prevail to make men wholly to abstain from this fault, I would be glad to compound with some Persons, and to gain this point of them however; because it would retrench *nine parts in ten* of the *evil-speaking* that is in the World.

Secondly, Before you speak evil of any man, consider whether he hath not obliged you by some real kindness, and then it is a bad return to speak ill of him who hath done us good. Consider also, whether you may not come hereafter to be acquainted with him, related to him, or obliged by him whom you have thus injured? And how will you then be ashamed when you reflect upon it, and perhaps have reason also to believe that he to whom you have done this injury is not ignorant of it?

Consider likewise, whether in the change of Human affairs, you may not some time or other come to stand in need of his favour; and how incapable this carriage of yours towards him will render you of it? And whether it may not be in his power to revenge a spiteful and needless word by a shrewd turn? So that if a man made no conscience of hurting others, yet he should in prudence have some consideration of himself.

E

Thirdly,

Thirdly, Let us accustom our selves to pity the Faults of men and to be truly sorry for them, and then we shall take no pleasure in publishing them. And this common Humanitie requires of us, considering the great infirmities of humane Nature, and that we our selves also are liable to be tempted : Considering likewise, how severe a Punishment every Fault and miscarriage is to it self ; and how terribly it exposeth a man to the wrath of God, both in this World and the other. He is not a good *Christian*, that is not heartily sorry for the faults even of his greatest Enemies ; and if he be so, he will discover them no further than is necessarie to some good end.

Fourthly, Whenever we hear any man evil-spoken of, if we know any good of him let us say *that*. It is always the more humane and the more honourable part to stand up in the defence and vindication of others, than to accuse and bespatter them. Possibly the good you have heard of them may not be true, but it is much more probable that the evil which you have heard of them is not true neither : However, it is better to preserve the credit of a bad man, than to stain the Reputation of the innocent. And if there were any need that a man should be evil-spoken of, it is but fair and equal that his good and bad Qualities should be mention'd together ; otherwise he may
be

be strangely misrepresented, and an indifferent Man may be made a Monster.

They that will observe nothing in a Wise man, but his oversights and follies; nothing in a Good man, but his failings and infirmities; may make a shift to render a very wise and good man very despicable. If one should heap together all the passionate Speeches, all the froward and imprudent Actions of the best Man; all that he had said, or done amiss in his whole Life, and present it all at one view, concealing his Wisdom and Vertue; the Man in this Disguise would look like a *Mad-man* or a *Furie*: And yet if his Life were fairly reported, and just in the same manner it was led; and his many and great Virtues set over against his failings and infirmities, he would appear to all the World to be an admirable and excellent Person. But how many and great soever any man's ill Qualities are, it is but just that with all this heavy load of Faults he should have the due praise of the few real Virtues that are in him.

Fifthly, That you may not speak ill of any, do not delight to hear ill of them. Give no countenance to *busy-bodies*, and those that love to talk of other men's Faults: Or if you cannot decently reprove them because of their Qualitie, then divert the discourse some other way; or if you can-

not do that, by seeming not to mind it you may sufficiently signifie that you do not like it.

Sixthly, Let every man mind himself, and his own Duty and Concernment. Do but endeavour in good earnest to mend thy self, and it will be work enough for one Man, and leave thee but little time to talk of others. When *Plato* withdrew from the Court of *Dionysius*, who would fain have had a famous *Philosopher* for his Flatterer, they parted in some unkindnes, and *Dionysius* bade him not to speak ill of him when he was return'd into *Greece*; *Plato* told him, *he had no leisure for it*; meaning that he had better things to mind, than to take up his thoughts, and talk with the faults of so bad a man, so notoriously known to all the World.

Lastly, Let us set a watch before the door of our lips, and not speak but upon consideration: I do not mean to speak *finely*, but *fitly*. Especially when thou speakest of others, consider of *whom*, and *what* thou art going to speak: Use great Caution and circumspection in this matter: Look well about thee; on every side of the thing, and on every person in the Company, before thy words slip from thee; which when they are once out of thy lips, are for ever out of thy power.

Not that men should be fullen in company, and say nothing; or so stiff in conversation, as to drop nothing but *Aphorisms* and *Oracles*: Especially, among Equals and Friends, we should not be so reserved as if we would have it taken for a mighty *favour that we vouchsafe to say any thing. If a Man had the understanding of an *Angel*, he must be contented to abate something of this excess of *Wisdom*, for fear of being thought *Cunning*. The true Art of Conversation, if any body can hitt upon it, seems to be this; an appearing freedom and opennes, with a resolute reservednes as little appearing as is possible.

All that I mean by this *Caution* is, that we should consider well what we say, especially of others. And to this end we should endeavour to get our minds furnished with matter of Discourse concerning things useful in themselves, and not hurtful to others: And, if we have but a mind wise enough, and good enough, we may easily find a field large enough for innocent Conversation; such as will harm no body, and yet be acceptable enough to the better and wiser part of Mankind: And why should any one be at the cost of playing the fool to gratifie any body whatsoever.

I have

I have done with the *Five* things I propounded to speak to upon this Argument. But because hardly any thing can be so clear, but something may be said against it; nor any thing so bad, but something may be pleaded in excuse for it: I shall therefore take notice of two or three *Pleas* that may be made for it.

First, Some pretend mighty injury and provocation. If in the same kind, it seems thou art sensible of it; and therefore thou of all men oughtest to abstain from it: But in what kind soever it be, the Christian Religion forbids Revenge. Therefore do not plead one Sin in excuse of another, and make *Revenge* an Apologie for *Reviling*.

Secondly, It is alledged by others, with a little better grace, that if this Doctrine were practised, Conversation would be spoil'd, and there would not be matter enough for pleasant discourse and entertainment.

I answer, The design of this Discourse is to redress a great evil in Conversation, and that I hope which mends it will not spoil it. And however, if mens Tongues lay a little more still, and most of us spake a good deal less than we do, both of our selves and others, I see no great harm in it: I
hope

hope we might for all that live comfortably and in good health, and see many good dayes. David, I am sure, prescribes it as an excellent Receipt, in his Opinion, for a quiet, and cheerful, and long Life, to refrain from evil-speaking; *What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many dayes that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking falsehood.* Psal. 34.
12, 13.

But granting that there is some pleasure in *Invective*, I hope there is a great deal more in *Innocence*: And the more any man considers this, the truer he will find it; and whenever we are serious, we our selves cannot but acknowledg it. When a man examines himself impartially before the *Sacrament*, or is put in mind upon a *Death-bed* to make reparation for Injuries done in this kind, he will then certainly be of this mind and wish he had not done them. For this certainly is one necessary qualification for the *B. Sacrament*, that we be in love and charitie with our neighbours; with which temper of mind this qualitie is utterly inconsistent.

Thirdly, There is yet a more specious *Plea* than either of the former, that men will be encouraged to do ill if they can escape the tongues of men; as they would do, if this *Doctrin* did effectually take place: Because by this means one great restraint from doing evil would be taken away,
which

which these good men who are so bent upon reforming the World, think would be great pity. For many who will venture upon the displeasure of God, will yet abstain from doing bad things for fear of reproach from Men: Besides, that this seems the most proper punishment of many Faults which the Laws of men can take no notice of.

Admitting all this to be true, yet it does not seem so good and laudable a way to punish one Fault by another. But let no man encourage himself in an evil way with this hope, that he shall escape the censure of men: when I have said all I can, there will, I fear, be evil-speaking enough in the World to chastise them that do ill: And though we should hold our peace, there will be bad tongues enow to reproach men with their evil doings. I wish we could but be persuaded to make the Experiment for a little while, whether men would not be sufficiently lash'd for their Faults, though we sate by and said nothing.

So that there is no need at all that good men should be concern'd in this odious Work. There will alwayes be offenders and *Malefactours* enow to be the *Executioners* to inflict this punishment upon one another. Therefore let no man presume upon Impunitie on the one hand; and on the other, let no man despair but that this busines will be sufficiently done one way
or

or other. I am very much mistaken, if we may not safely trust an ill-natur'd World that there will be no failure of Justice in this kind.

And here, if I durst, I would fain have said a word or two concerning that more publick sort of *Obloquy* by *Lampoons* and *Libells*, so much in fashion in this wittie Age. But I have no mind to provoke a very terrible sort of men. Yet thus much I hope may be said without offence, that how much soever men are pleas'd to see others abused in this kind, yet it is alwayes grievous when it comes to their own turn : However I cannot but hope that every man that impartially considers must own it to be a fault of a very high nature to revile those whom God hath placed in Authority over us, and to *slander the footsteps of the Lords Anointed* : Especially since it is so expressly written, *Thou shalt not speak evil of the Rulers of thy People.*

Having represented the great evil of this Vice, it might not now be improper to say something to those who suffer by it. Are we guilty of the evil said of us? let us reform, and cut off all occasions for the future; and so turn the malice of our Enemies to our own advantage, and defeat their ill intentions by making so good an use of it : And then it will be well for us to have been evil spoken of.

F

Are

Are we innocent ? We may so much the better bear it patiently ; imitating herein the Pattern of our *B. Saviour*, who when he was reviled , reviled not again, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.

We may consider likewise, that though it be a misfortune to be evil-spoken of, it is their fault that do it, and not ours ; and therefore should not put us into Passion , because another man's being injurious to me is no good reason why I should be uneasie to my self. We should not revenge the injuries done to us, no not upon them that do them, much less upon our selves. Let no man's Provocation make thee to lose thy Patience. Be not such a fool, as to part with any one Virtue because some men are so malicious as to endeavour to rob thee of the Reputation of all the rest. When men speak ill of thee, do as *Plato* said he would do in that case ; live so, as that no body may believe them.

All that now remains is to reflect upon what hath been said, and to urge you and my self to do accordingly. For all is nothing, if we do not practise what we so plainly see to be our Duty. Many are so taken up with the deep *Points* and *Mysteries* of Religion, that they never think of the common *Duties* and *Offices* of human Life. But Faith and a good Life are so far from clashing with
one

one another, that the *Christian Religion* hath made them inseparable. True *Faith* is necessary in order to a good *Life*, and a good *Life* is the genuine product of a right *Belief*; and therefore the one never ought to be press'd to the prejudice of the other.

I foresee what will be, because it hath so often been said in the like case; that there is *not one word of Jesus Christ in all this*. No more is there in the *Text*. And yet I hope that *Jesus Christ* is truly preach'd, when ever his *Will* and *Laws*, and the *Duties* injoyn'd by the *Christian Religion* are inculcated upon us.

But some men are pleas'd to say, that *this is mere Morality*; I answer, that this is *Scripture-Morality* and *Christian-Morality*, and who hath any thing to say against *that*? Nay, I will go yet further, that no man ought to pretend to believe the *Christian Religion*, who lives in the neglect of so plain a *Duty*; and in the practice of a *Sin* so clearly condemn'd by it, as this of *evil-speaking* is.

But because the *Word of God* is quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged *Sword*, yea sharper than *Calumnie* it self; and pierceth the very hearts and Consciences of men, laying us open to our selves, and convincing us of our more secret as well as our more visible Faults; I shall therefore at one view represent to you what is dispersedly said concerning this *Sin* in the *H. Word of God*. And

And I have purposely reserved this to the last, because it is more persuasive and penetrating than any Human Discourse. And to this end be pleas'd to consider in what company the *H. Ghost* doth usually mention this Sin. There is scarce any black Catalogue of Sins in the Bible but we find this among them; in the company of the very worst Actions and most irregular Passions of men. Out of the heart, sayes our Saviour, proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, false witness, evil-speaking. And the Apostle ranks backbiters with fornicators, and murderers, and haters of God; and with those of whom it is expressly said that they shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Matth.
15. 19.

Rom. 1.
29.

1 Cor. 6.
10.

And when he enumerates the Sins of the last times, Men, says he, shall be lovers of themselves, covetous, boasters, evil-speakers, without natural affection, perfidious, false accusers, &c. And which is the strangest of all, they who are said to be guilty of these great Vices and enormities are noted by the Apostle to be great pretenders to Religion; for so it follows in the next words, having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof. So that it is no new thing for men to make a more than an ordinary profession of Christianity, and yet at the same time to live in a most palpable contradiction to the Precepts of that *H. Religion*: As if any pretence to *Mysterie* and I know not what extraordinary

2 Tim. 3.
2, 3.

nary attainments in the knowledg of *Christ*, could exempt men from obedience to his *Laws*, and set them above the *Virtues* of a good *Life*.

And now after all this, do we hardly think *that* to be a *Sin*, which is in *Scripture* so frequently rank'd with *Murther* and *Adultery* and the *blackest Crimes*; such as are inconsistent with the life and power of *Religion*, and will certainly shut men out of the *Kingdom of God*? Do we believe the *Bible* to be the *Word of God*? and can we allow our selves in the common practice of a *Sin*, than which there is hardly any *Fault* of mens lives more frequently mention'd, more severely reprov'd, and more odiously branded in that *H. Book*?

Consider seriously these *Texts*. *Who shall abide* PL. 15. 1.
in thy *Tabernacle*, *who shall dwell in thy holy Hill*? *He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour*. Have ye never heard what our *Saviour* says, that of every idle word we must give an account in the day of *Judgment*; that by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemn'd? What can be more severe than that of *St. James*? If any man among you seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, that man's *Religion* is vain.

To conclude: The *Sin*, which I have now warn'd men against, is plainly condemn'd by the *Word of God*; and the *Duty* which I have now been
persuading

persuading you to, is easie for every man to understand, not hard for any man, that can but resolve to keep a good guard upon himself for some time, by the grace of God to practice; and most reasonable for all Men, but especially for all Christians, to observe. It is as easie as a resolute silence, upon just occasion, as reasonable as prudence and justice and charitie, and the preservation of peace and good-will among men, can make it; and of as necessary and indispenfable an obligation, as the Authority of God can render any thing,

Upon all which Considerations let us every one of us be perswaded to take up *David's* deliberate Resolution, *I said, I will take heed to my wayes, that I offend not with my tongue.* And I do verily believe, that would we but heartily endeavour to amend this one Fault, we should soon be better men in our whole lives: I mean, that the correcting of this Vice, together with those that are nearly allied to it, and may at the same time, and almost with the same resolution and care be corrected, would make us Owners of a great many considerable Virtues, and carry us on a good way towards perfection; it being hardly to be imagin'd that a man that makes conscience of his Words should not take an equal or a greater care of his Actions. And this I take to be both the true meaning and the true reason of that saying of St. James,

James, and with which I shall conclude ; If any man offend not in Word, the same is a perfect man.

Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the Sheep; through the blood of the everlasting Covenant, make you perfect in every good word and work, to do his will ; working in you alwayes that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ , to whom be glory for ever, Amen.

T H E E N D .

1737

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